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ABSTRACT

A study explored the affective impact of interpersonal influence messages. Thirty-nine students enrolled in an undergraduate communication course listened to a tape-recording of 15 directives and rated each directive on explicitness or dominance. Results indicated that the set of stimuli tapped nearly the full range of both continua, and that the directives were distributed across each of the four conceptual quadrants formed by crossing explicitness and dominance. In a second study, 183 students answered a questionnaire to indicate valence and arousal, and listened to audiotapes about borrowing class notes to grade affect. Results indicated that the perceived legitimacy of a request had an effect; requests perceived as legitimate were responded to more positively and with less arousal than illegitimate requests. Results suggest that language bears a unique relationship to affect. These findings attest to the importance of a multidimensional assessment of directives (with implications for instruction). (Three tables of data and two figures are included; an appendix contains the stimulus situation.) (PRA)

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Exploring the Affective Impact of Interpersonal Influence Messages

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Running Head: INFLUENCE & AFFECT

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Although many studies have examined the relationship between the linguistic form of a message and compliance, few, if any, have attempted to understand the impact that language might have on feelings. Given the common assumption that influence messages are intrusive (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987) and that it intrusiveness creates the need for alternate linguistic forms, it follows that such messages could engender negative feelings. This paper describes an effort to explore that likelihood. In the service of that aim, we attempted to fit together the theory and research on interpersonal influence with some relevant aspects of the emotion literature.

Perceptions of Influence Messages

The term directives is used to refer to short strings of words that are intended to bring about some change in the behavior of the target person (Ervin-Tripp, 1976). A recent paper by Harkness (1990) reports the results of a multidimensional scaling of directives that yielded a two-dimensional solution. The first dimension was labeled Explicit-Inexplicit and the second dimension Authoritative-Supplicating.

Her findings are buttressed by the work of Kemper and Thissen (1981). Using a sample of adults, those researchers also retained a two dimensional solution to the multidimensional scaling of a much smaller number of directives. They label their dimensions Directness and Politeness, although the latter could just as easily have been interpreted as dominance. Moreover, a number of exploratory analyses of compliance-gaining messages

show similar results (see Dillard, 1990, for a review). In short, several lines of evidence converge toward the dual conclusions that influence messages are perceived multidimensionally and that the two most important dimensions are explicitness and dominance.

The Structure of Affective Experience

Although many alternatives exist, a parsimonious representation of affective space is provided by Russell's (1980) circumplex model (see Figure 1). Because of its simplicity, we found it particularly attractive for this initial inquiry into the relationship between the language of influence messages and its impact on the affective experience.

Figure 1 about here

As Figure 1 shows, a valence dimension and an arousal dimension are used to characterize affect. Within the two-dimensional space are the specific labels given to different combinations of values on the two organizing dimensions.

One feature of the model, which is key to this undertaking, is the implicit assumption that accompanies acceptance of the two dimensions. That assumption concerns changes in feelings such as might result from reception of a message. If feelings can be validly characterized as a combination of valence and arousal, then movement toward one feeling state necessarily implies movement away from some other. For example, if an individual is sleepy, but then becomes more aroused, he or she moves up the arousal dimension toward surprise, leaving behind the state of

sleepiness. In this way, much like two persons on a seesaw, the feelings in the circumplex are connected to one another; an increase in one implies a decrease in at least one of the others.

The Affective Impact of Influence Messages

Having isolated the phenomenological components on either side of the message-affect link, the next step was to consider the theoretical process that might form the connection between them. Frijda (1986, especially p. 265), in his comprehensive review of the emotion literature, outlines the basic mechanism in virtually all modern theories of emotion. These theories point toward the process of assessing the degree of match between a persons motives, goals, or desires, and the state of the environment. Put simply, positive emotions arise when an individual perceives a match and negative emotions result from mismatch.

Conceptually, this matching mechanism shows strong resemblance to the fundamental assumption of politeness theories; requests are intrusive, i.e., they threaten to create mismatch. In principle, even as innocuous a request as "Would you pass the salt?" may intrude upon the target's desire for autonomy. When the target in engaged in the execution of some planned activity, any request that disrupts that activity is clearly intrusive. Presumably, speakers are aware of this potential for mismatch and strive to use language in ways that will actually or perceptually minimize the degree of mismatch created by use of a directive.

The target of the directive is cast in the role of appraiser. He or she is faced with the task of sorting out the degree of match or mismatch represented by the request. Certainly, the content of a request should bear on the extent to which a directive is seen as causing mismatch. That is the usual meaning of intrusiveness, i.e., that large requests are more intrusive than small requests. But, the linguistic features of the message convey other important information regarding how the request should be appraised.

Frijda (1986) argues that individuals appraise a situation in terms of 12 "core components" (pp. 204-206), two of which appear particularly relevant to the present paper. Clarity refers to the extent to which the situational meaning structure is distinct and articulated. Seriousness refers to the scope of the potential consequences of the situation for the individual.

Because explicit directives make clear the intent of the source, it seems plausible that increases in the explicitness of the message might be expected to increase situational clarity. Similarly, since dominant messages convey the source's intent to act on his or her own behalf rather than to accommodate the concerns of the target, they should make apparent the seriousness of the speaker as an agent of mismatch. Both message features should have the effect of amplifying the perceived mismatch between the stimulus event, in this case the speaker, and the goals and desires of the target. Hence, both features should

contribute in important ways to the constellation of variables that bring about affect.

Given our reliance on a two-dimensional characterization of affect, the following prediction can be offered: Valence (positive) will decrease and arousal will increase as a the explicitness and dominance of the directive increase (Hypothesis 1). These changes should manifest themselves not only in direct measures of valence and arousal, but also in the behavior of the discrete feelings illustrated in Figure 1. Stated in those terms, as the explicitness and dominance of directives increase, we should expect to see increases in surprise, anger, fear, and annoyance, and accompanying decreases in happiness, relaxation, and sleepiness. With reference to Figure 1, we should expect to see an increase in the intensity of feelings in the upper, left quadrant (aroused/negative) and a decrease in the feelings that occupy the lower, right quadrant (subdued/positive).

Situation and Affect

There is some evidence that variations in the perceived legitimacy of a situation shape compliance-gaining messages (Dillard, Henwood, Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1990). To the extent that concerns about legitimacy guide message production, we might also expect them to play a role in message appraisal. In line with earlier work, which showed that judgments of illegitimacy produce anger (e.g., Scherer, Summerfield, &

Wallbott, 1983), we predicted that as legitimacy decreases, so should valence (positive) of feeling decrease and so should arousal increase (Hypothesis 2). As with the first hypothesis, we anticipated that reports of specific feelings would parallel the findings for valence and arousal, such that as legitimacy decreases, surprise, anger, fear, and annoyance should increase, and happiness, relaxation, and sleepiness should decrease. With reference to Figure 1, we should expect an increase in the intensity of feelings of the upper, left quadrant and a decrease in the feelings in the lower, right quadrant.

Study 1: Scaling Requests

The purpose of the initial study was twofold. First, we wished to ensure that we had developed a set of stimuli that was representative of each of the sampling frame formed by crossing explicitness and dominance. Our second aim was to obtain more precise estimates of perceptions of the degree of explicitness and dominance of each of the requests. We planned to use these latter estimates as values in the main study.

Participants and procedure

A total of 39 students enrolled in an undergraduate communication course participated in the scaling study. After an explanation of the meaning of explicitness and dominance, the students listened to a tape-recording of the 15 directives given in Table 1 (in the order in which they appear in the table) and then rated each directive either on explicitness (n = 19) or dominance (n = 20). An abbreviated description of the context of

the requests was also given prior to the ratings (described below); it did not include the legitimacy manipulation used in the main study. Ratings were made on 7-point scales ranging from extremely direct/dominant to extremely indirect/submissive where higher values indicated greater explicitness and greater dominance.

Table 1 about here

Results and discussion

Examination of the mean ratings indicated that the set of stimuli tapped nearly the full range of both continua. For explicitness, the means ranged from a low of 1.71 to a high of 6.53. For dominance, the means ranged from 2.65 to 6.50 also on a seven-point scale. Additionally, the directives were distributed across each of the four conceptual quadrants formed by crossing explicitness and dominance. The eight directives chosen for use in the main study are underlined in Table 1 and a plot of their values on the two judgment variables is given in Figure 2.

Table 1 & Figure 2 about here

Because we intended to use the mean ratings of explicitness and dominance as values of our independent variables in the main study, it was of interest to assess the degree of error in the scaling data. For the explicitness ratings, the interjudge correlations averaged .73 which yielded a coefficient alpha of .98. For the dominance ratings, the mean interjudge correlation

was .74 which gave an alpha of .98. All of these findings indicated that the manipulations produced the intended perceptual differences in explicitness and dominance.

Study 2: The Affective Impact of Directives

In the main study, listened to a tape recording of an interaction in which one person asked to borrow another's class notes (adapted from Roloff & Janiszewski, 1989). Subjects were asked to imagine themselves as the target of the request. Variations in legitimacy were achieved by providing two different types of contextualizing information. The vignette was constructed so that the request created an obvious mismatch between the needs of the source and the proposed (by the target) state of the environment.

Participants, Procedures, and Materials

183 persons enrolled in undergraduate communication courses participated in the main study. Upon arriving at the laboratory, a brief overview of the study was given orally, then each participant received a questionnaire. Included in the questionnaire was an extensive explanation of Russell, Weiss, and Mendelsohn's (1989) Affect Grid. The Affect Grid is a nine-by-nine matrix intended to represent a two-dimensional emotional space. The horizontal dimension indicates the valence of the emotion, whereas the vertical axis references degree of arousal. Subjects could place a mark in any of the 81 cells to indicate the mixture of valence and arousal that they were feeling. Finally, an audio tape was played that described an interaction

with a friend. In each case the friend, Bill, asked the target, i.e., the subject's role, if he could borrow his or her class notes because he had been absent from class. In the low legitimacy condition, he missed class because he was vacationing. In the high legitimacy condition, he missed class because he was in the hospital. Appendix A provides a complete description of the situation description.

Immediately following the description, one of the eight requests selected from the preliminary study was inserted in the tape (see Table 1). Subjects were then instructed to mark the Affect Grid.

The next part of the questionnaire was composed of 29 words intended to tap the specific feelings in illustrated in Figure 1. Study participants were instructed to rate the extent to which they were experiencing each of the 29 words/feelings on a scale that ranged from 0 = None of this emotion to 6 = A lot of this emotion.

Finally, subjects rated Bill's request on three 7-point semantic differential scales: fair-unfair, reasonable-unreasonable, and legitimate-illegitimate.

Results

Measurement Analyses

Prior to testing the hypotheses, each of the multi-item measures was submitted to a confirmatory factor analysis. In accordance with the principles of confirmatory factor analysis articulated by Hunter (1980), we attempted to fit the items to

the hypothesized structures on the basis of content homogeneity, internal consistency, and external consistency. By these criteria, the three manipulation check items on legitimacy were unidimensional with a reliability of .89. The manipulation check index correlated .39, $p < .001$, with assignment to condition.

Analysis of the feeling items indicated that the ten feeling scales were operating largely as expected. The feeling scales, their items, and the associated coefficient alphas were: Angry (furious, angry, outraged), .91, Annoyed (irritated, annoyed, aggravated), .93, Surprised (surprised, amazed, astonished), .75, Sad (mournful, sad, dreary), .60, Depressed (pathetic, depressed, pitiful), .69, Sleepy (sleepy, tired, drowsy), .94, Afraid (fearful, afraid), 74, Happy (cheerful, content, happy), .80, Delighted (thrilled, overjoyed, delighted), .79, and Relaxed (calm, relaxed, gentle), .75. Although the reliabilities for the sadness and depression scales were lower than desired, they were still considered adequate for our purposes. Apart from these minor concerns, the measurement model showed good fit to the data.

Theoretical Analyses: Arousal and Valence

Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted using explicitness, dominance, legitimacy, and the interaction between dominance and explicitness as predictor variables. Using the mean values generated in the scaling study, explicitness and dominance were treated as continuous variables (rather than simply coding them high/low to reflect their quadrant placement).

This procedure has the advantage of maximizing the precision of the manipulation of the language variables. The three main effect terms were mean deviated and a product term was created to represent the dominance by explicitness interaction.

The three-item measure of perceived legitimacy was used in these and later analyses rather than assignment to condition because of its sensitivity to individual variations in the manipulation and because of the importance that theories of emotion place upon interpretation of an event, rather than the event itself, as an important determinant of the resulting feeling. Analyses run with group assignment instead of perceived legitimacy yielded very similar, though slightly weaker, results.

Two dependent measures were formed from the Affect Grid data. Arousal was indexed by the vertical placement of the subject's marking on the Affect Grid immediately following the request. Valence scores reflected placement on the horizontal axis. Valence was scored such that higher values reflected an increasing degree of positive affect.

In the first step of the regressions, the three main effects were entered as a block.[1] The interaction term was entered on the second step. The significant results may be summarized as follows: for Arousal, $R = .22$, $p < .10$, beta for legitimacy = -.20, $p < .01$, for Valence, $R = .60$, $p < .01$, beta for legitimacy = .56, $p < .01$. Several conclusions may be drawn. First, the multiple correlations indicate that valence was predicted much better than was arousal. Second, the only variable that

predicted either of the criterions was perception of legitimacy. As predicted by Hypothesis 2, legitimacy showed a positive relationship with valence and a negative relationship with arousal. Third, the language variables had no observable effect on arousal or valence either alone or in combination. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was not supported in the Affect Grid data.

The Structure of the Feeling Scales

Our theorizing depended on Russell's claim (1980) that feelings can be usefully organized on two dimensions: arousal and valence. To assess the extent to which a two-dimensional model fit the data in this study we carried out a principal axis factor analysis (i.e., communalities were placed in the diagonal), constrained to a two-factor solution, followed by an oblique rotation. When inspection of the plots of factor loadings did not reveal the anticipated circumplex, we repeated the analysis without constraints. The result was a three-factor solution. Factor I was composed of Angry (loading = .86), Surprised (.71), and Annoyed (.76). Factor II was made up of Sad (.92), Depressed (.68), Sleepy (.41), and Afraid (.50). Finally, Happy (.80), Delighted (.64), and Relaxed (.52) defined the third factor. These findings suggested that adoption of the circumplex model was not entirely warranted in this case.

Theoretical Analyses: The Feeling Scales

A series of hierarchical regressions were carried out that used explicitness, dominance, legitimacy, and the explicitness by dominance interaction to predict each of the specific feelings.

As the multiple correlation column in Table 2 makes clear, this set of variables reliably predicted seven of the ten feelings examined in this study. Examination of the standardized regression coefficients revealed that legitimacy was the strongest and most consistent of the predictor variables. It showed a negative relationship with the Factor I feelings such that anger, annoyance, and surprise all occurred more strongly with an illegitimate request than with a legitimate one. Legitimacy exhibited a direct relationship with the positive feelings such that more legitimate requests tended to produce happiness and relaxation, and to a lesser extent, delight.

Table 2 about here

Two members of the group of the Factor II feelings were also affected by judgments of legitimacy. The more legitimate the situation, the less depressed and the more sleepy subjects said they felt.

The main effects of linguistic variation on affective responses were almost nonexistent. Explicitness showed a negative relationship with sleepiness and a positive relationship with relationship with relaxation. There were no other statistically reliable main effects for explicitness and none for dominance as main effect variables. However, the two language variables did produce a significant interaction effect on feelings of anger, annoyance, and surprise. In order to examine the form of these interactions the sample was split on explicitness and another series of regressions were run using

dominance and legitimacy as predictor variables. The results, given in Table 3, show that directives must be high in both explicitness and dominance to produce anger, annoyance, and surprise.

Table 3 about here

Discussion

Certainly the most robust finding in this study was the effect of the perceived legitimacy of a request. The Affect Grid data provided clear indication that legitimate requests were responded to both more positively and with less arousal than illegitimate requests. Buttressing these results are the findings for the specific affect measures which showed that legitimate requests were negatively related to anger, annoyance, and surprise. Both sets of results are consistent with Hypothesis 2 and with theories of emotion that suggest that an angering event is one in which something challenges what "ought" to happen (e.g., Roseman, 1984; Scherer, 1984). However, the impact of legitimacy was not limited to the strong, negative feelings. A mirror-image of those effects was observed in that legitimacy showed significant, positive associations with happiness, delight, and relaxation. Taken as a whole these findings are compatible with the seesaw assumption that is implicit in the circumplex model of affect, i.e., that increases in one quadrant imply decreases in another quadrant.

The results for the language variables were fewer in number, but quite intriguing. The data revealed that dominance and

explicitness interact in their impact on surprise, anger, and annoyance. No effects were observed on the dimensional affect indices, i.e., those derived from the Affect Grid; nor was there any evidence that the increases in the Factor I feelings, which resulted from the combination of dominance and explicitness, were accompanied by a decrease in the mirror-image affects. Overall then, relationships among the language variables and affect did not show the seesaw pattern that characterized the legitimacy effects. Although our conclusions must necessarily be tempered by the limitations of the study, it would appear that language bears a unique relationship to affect -- one that has not been captured well in existing studies of affect and situational appraisal (e.g., Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Such studies, while extremely valuable in their own right, have apparently been insensitive to the subtle, but important, effects of language variation.

The results also point up the necessity of examining the operation of both explicitness and dominance. Had we adopted a unidimensional view of directives, one that depended on either explicitness or dominance, we would have drawn the erroneous conclusion that directives and affect are unrelated. Hence, these findings dovetail nicely with our arguments for the importance of a multidimensional assessment of directives.

In sum, the purpose in this project was to scout the terrain that is jointly defined by influence messages and affect. Although this initial foray was circumscribed in a number of

ways, most notably by a limited number of messages and situations, it was nonetheless successful in providing a glimpse of the exciting possibilities in this new region of inquiry.

Endnotes

1. Although the independent variables were conceptually orthogonal there was no requirement that they be empirically orthogonal. In fact, explicitness and dominance correlated .57, explicitness and legitimacy -.11, and dominance and legitimacy -.07. We speculate that the correlation between the language variables is not an artifact of our stimuli, but that it reflects a robust empirical feature of influence messages (see Dillard et al.'s 1990 findings for positivity and directness in compliance-gaining messages). Consequently, we believe this to be a strength of our stimulus set (enhanced ecological validity), rather than a weakness. Nonetheless, we recognize that collinearity of this degree poses potential problems for tests of the main effects. To assess the severity of this potential problem we conducted separate main effect analyses, i.e., bivariate correlations, in addition to the regressions reported in the body of the text. With one exception, the explicitness-surprised correlation was significant, the substantive conclusions did not change. Given that explicitness and dominance naturally occur together, that the number of tests conducted was relatively large, and that there was no discernible pattern of explicitness effects, we were reluctant to make very much of that one difference.

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Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations (in parentheses) for Ratings of the Explicitness and Dominance of 15 Directives

Explicitness	Dominance	Directives
5.26 (.99)	3.80 (.70)	1. May I borrow your notes?
4.79 (1.62)	5.60 (.60)	2. Hey, remember when I loaned you my notes for the midterm. Now it's my turn.
3.89 (1.20)	2.65 (.49)	3. Is there any way I could borrow your notes?
6.53 (1.07)	6.75 (.44)	4. I'm going to need notes. Give me those.
3.21 (1.40)	4.70 (.80)	5. I'm going to have to borrow some notes.
5.58 (.84)	4.80 (.62)	6. Let me borrow your notes.
2.47 (.77)	2.80 (1.06)	7. Do you think you'll be using your notes the next couple of days?
5.05 (1.22)	3.00 (.92)	8. Uh, can I borrow your notes?
5.89 (.99)	5.75 (.64)	9. I want to borrow your notes from last week.
1.79 (.71)	2.70 (1.26)	10. Are those the notes from last week's lecture?
3.05 (1.18)	5.20 (1.01)	11. I'm gonna need notes.
5.37 (.83)	3.50 (1.00)	12. Would you lend me your notes?
6.16 (.83)	6.50 (.83)	13. I'll bet those are last week's notes. Lend them to me.
1.74 (.81)	3.20 (1.24)	14. I don't think that I have all the notes for the exam.

Table 1 cont.

2.32 (.89)	4.75 (1.25)	15. Those are the notes from last week aren't they? I haven't seen them yet.

Note. Ratings (n = 19 for explicitness and n = 20 for dominance) were made on a 1-7 scale where higher values indicate more of the property. The underlined directives were used as stimuli in the main study.

Table 2
Results of Regression Analyses Predicting Feelings

Criterion Variables	Predictor Variables: Explicit-ness(Ex)	Dominance(Do)	Legitimacy	Ex X Do	R
Factor 1					
Angry	-.09	.07	-.65**	.19**	.69**
Annoyed	-.10	.04	-.69**	.17**	.72**
Surprised	.10	-.00	-.37**	.16*	.46**
Factor 2					
Sad	-.01	.03	-.02	.04	.07
Depressed	.02	-.02	-.16*	.01	.17
Afraid	.05	.02	-.09	.01	.13
Sleepy	-.28**	.04	.16*	.06	.30**
Factor 3					
Happy	.00	-.11	.38**	-.09	.44**
Delighted	.01	-.15^	.16*	-.00	.23*
Relaxed	.20*	-.12	.38**	-.12	.42**

Note: Table entries are standardized regression coefficients except for those values in the column labeled "R" which are multiple correlation coefficients.

^p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 3
An Examination of the Interaction of Explicitness and Dominance on Angry, Annoyed, and Surprised

		Predictor Variables		
Explicitness	Feeling	Dominance	Legitimacy	R
High	Angry	.20*	-.66*	.70*
(n = 94)	Annoyed	.16*	-.66*	.69*
	Surprised	.18[a]	-.26*	.33*
Low	Angry	-.08	-.65*	.65*
(n = 89)	Annoyed	-.08	-.73*	.73*
	Surprised	-.07	-.54*	.54*

Note: Table entries are standardized regression coefficients except for those values in the column labeled "R" which are multiple correlation coefficients.

[a]$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Figure 1
A Circumplex Model of Feelings

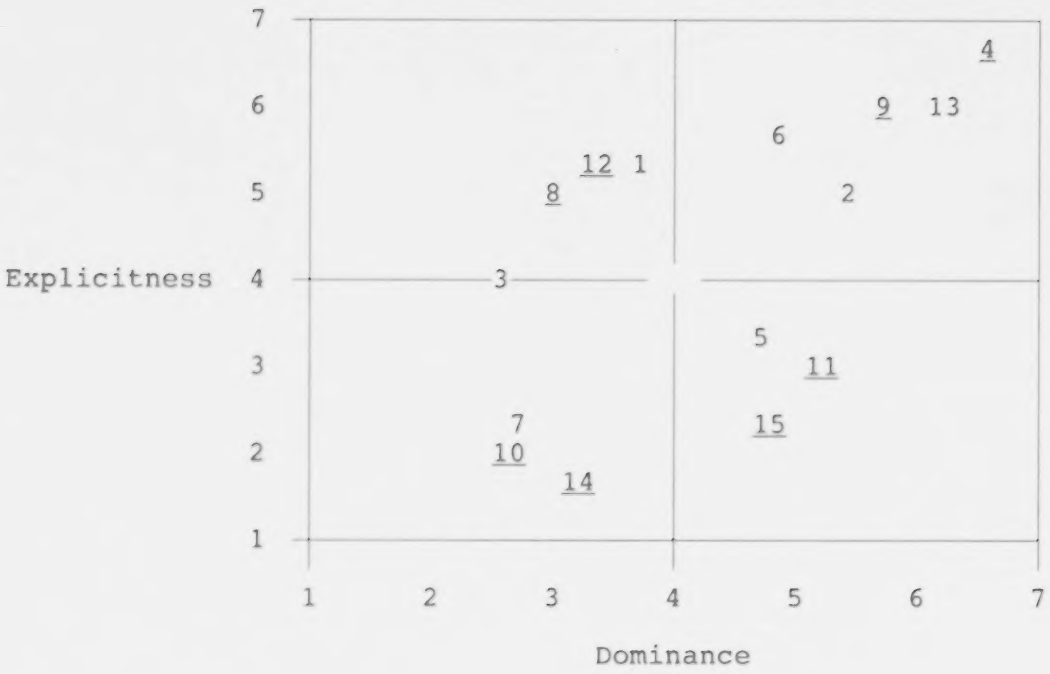

Figure 2
A Plot of the Mean Explicitness and Dominance Value of Each Directive

Note. The numbers in the plot correspond to the item numbers in Table 1. Underlined numbers indicate those directives that were used as stimuli in the main study.

Appendix A: Stimulus Situation

The female narrator said:

Imagine that you are enrolled in a Communication Arts course this semester, one that you like but that you also find challenging. You've got a good grade going in the class so far and would like to maintain it.

When you go to class you usually sit in the same spot. Bill, whom you met in the class, sits next to you. Over the course of the spring semester you and Bill have become pretty good friends. The two of you meet for lunch sometimes, you study together for this class, and you have been to parties at Bill's house a couple of times.

As finals time rolls around you spend more and more time in the library. The pressure is on. Today you are on your way to the library to study for your Comm Arts final exam, which is just three days away, and to put in some time on a paper for another class. It's a chilly morning, but the sun is out and shining brightly. Imagine that you are walking across Library Mall. Take a moment to picture all this in your mind.

As you head toward the library with your class notes and books under your arm someone calls you by name. You turn around to see Bill smiling and walking toward you. He comes up to you and says, (male actor began here) "Hey, how're ya doin? I haven't seen you around for awhile. I wasn't in class last week cuz I went camping up north. Man, it was stupendous! I wish you coulda been there." (Low legitimacy) I wasn't in class last week cuz I was in the hospital for a day and then at home -- I had an ear infection. But they gave me some antibiotics that cleared it up. Now I'm good as new." (High legitimacy)